

Primary Source Set 8

Georgia from World War I through the Great Depression

Historical Context

Like most places in the world, Georgia was affected by the First World War and played a major role, even as the country initially ignored the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Even after the torpedoing of the *Lithuania* Georgians had little interest in the war. By the end of the war, though, the state housed many training grounds for American troops and contributed around 100,000 Georgians to U.S. forces. The war also affected much of the homefront, as women and African-Americans began taking part in the workforce when men went across the ocean, especially as white men were actively trying to prohibit black men from volunteering or being drafted to join the military.

It may be hard for students to imagine that after the war, less than 80 years ago, there were many people in Georgia living without electricity and running water. Until the creation of the Rural Electrification Administration in 1935, most Georgians living in rural areas went without electricity or running water. The rest of the nation was experiencing intense urbanization, but most of the South was remaining fairly rural. Like the rest of the south, Georgia relied heavily on agriculture, was extremely segregated, and its state income average was far below the national average.

Traveling from the bustling “New South” city of Atlanta to the surrounding rural farm areas must have felt a little like time travel. In the years of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called the south “the nation’s number one economic problem” and dedicated many New Deal efforts to revamping those states below the Mason-Dixon Line, including Georgia. For example, the Rural Electrification Administration, a New Deal project, brought electricity to the countryside. Along with the economic destruction of the Great Depression, Georgians in this period witnessed the devastation of the cotton crop from drought and the Boll Weevil. Many New Deal efforts went unsuccessful in the south, but Roosevelt’s dedication set a precedent of national aid for southern states in economic need. Still, Georgian economic strife persisted through the 1930s until it was finally pushed into industrial success during World War II.

Primary Sources

Eugene Talmadge, E.D. Rivers and Franklin Roosevelt made marked impressions on Georgia’s government and politics between the wars, and Margaret Mitchell brought national attention to Georgia when she published her epic novel *Gone with the Wind*. Primary sources

from this period highlight the economic, political, cultural, and social realities of Georgia between the world wars. This primary source set offers five primary sources related to Georgia life during the First World War, the rise of FDR and the Great Depression.

"More than Three Hundred and Sixty Soldiers Lose Life in Big Shipwreck."

Between 1917 and 1918, Georgians experienced a world at war. Georgia played an important role in World War I. There were five major military installations located in the state of Georgia and several war-training camps. Civilians participated in the war effort by purchasing bonds, growing liberty gardens, manufacturing ammunitions, and other volunteer efforts. On September 25th, 1918, an estimated 130 men from Georgia lost their lives in a tragic accident as a violent wave caused a crash between the Otranto and Kashmir, two ships carrying troops to England. The crash caused the Otranto to veer off course and sink. The small town of Nashville, Georgia lost 20 citizens in the accident. Residents of Nashville erected a monument to the victims of the disaster after the war. The front page of the Daily Times Enterprise on October 12, 1918, covers more WWI topics than the Otranto sinking. The front page offers general war news and, in the left corner, an ad for war bonds and stamps. Students can imagine themselves as a Georgia citizen in 1918 reading their morning newspaper. What reaction would they have to the Otranto sinking? How are the war efforts going? Does the ad make you consider purchasing a war bond? Using the Digital Library of Georgia, students can search multiple historic newspaper archives by date. Students could potentially read hundreds of newspaper articles covering WWI. Students may notice some interesting patterns. A potential assignment could be to examine the differences in the way newspapers in Georgia covered WWI before and after the United States entered the war.

Political poster of Eugene Talmadge

Eugene Talmadge became a dominant figure in Georgia politics from 1926 to 1946. His first successful bid for office came in 1926 when he won the race for Commissioner of Agriculture. Throughout his political career, Talmadge portrayed himself as a friend of the farmer. While serving as Commissioner of Agriculture, he promoted his political views through the office newsletter. This simple poster is a great example of Talmadge's campaign techniques as he makes the argument that he knows the plight of the farmer because he has been one himself. Talmadge was able to carry many rural counties on this message. You may want to ask students to imagine how different Georgians may have reacted to this poster during the election. For example, what might a rural farmer think about the poster versus an urban manufacturer? Students may recognize similar techniques being used in modern campaigns. Ask students to think about times when a politician argued that they understood the people better than their opponent. Do students think this technique works?

Political Handbill for Eugene Talmadge

Eugene Talmadge served as governor from 1933-1937, 1941-1943, and was elected again in 1946. During his governorship he promoted limited government, low taxes, and the plight of the farmer. This handbill comes from Talmadge's final gubernatorial election of 1946. The issues of this election reflect the greater issues at play in post-WWII Georgia. The federal courts had declared the Democratic Party's white primary invalid and Talmadge ran promising to preserve it and retain the racial hierarchy in Georgia. He also promised to lead Georgia through the post-war era. Throughout the handbill, Talmadge references the danger of communism and socialism, a fear that developed further in the Cold War years. Similar to his previous elections, Talmadge focused on issues close to the heart of white citizens in rural Georgia. The county unit system, which favored rural areas, helped Talmadge win his final election despite losing the popular vote. Talmadge's death in December 21, 1946, led to the infamous "three governors controversy." After reading this handbill, students should be able to summarize the political tactics and ideologies of Eugene Talmadge. The issues discussed in the handbill will also provide students with an understanding of the main issues being debated in Georgia during this period.

The Mexican cotton boll weevil

The boll weevil took up residence in Georgia's cotton fields between 1915 and the early 1990s and the infestation made cotton production unprofitable. This booklet, created by the Georgia State Board of Entomology in 1916, offered farmers some insight into the boll weevil infestation. The map from the booklet gives a good visual representation of just how massive the boll weevil infestation was. The other page provided from the booklet offers students a look at the scientific make-up of the boll weevil. Putting the two pages together will give students a picture of how a small insect impacted such a large area of the country. Understanding the poor economic situation the boll weevil created for cotton farmers may help students better understand the two primary sources related to Eugene Talmadge. How might farmers dealing with the boll weevil infestation react to Eugene Talmadge?

Works Progress Administration District 8 scrapbook and photo album

President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) by executive order in 1935 as a part of his New Deal. The WPA acted as a work-relief program hiring unemployed citizens to build roads, bridges, airports, public parks, and other public facilities. WPA programs also included the federal art, music, theater, and writer's projects. People were also employed for other tasks, including sewing, bookbinding and working in schools. The photos in this set are from the WPA District 8 scrapbook. The images show WPA activities

in the Savannah area between 1940 and 1941. These images show Georgians involved in various types of work under the auspices of the WPA.

1. Breakdown of images in WPA scrapbook:
2. Book repair program
3. Community farm
4. Draftsmen
5. Map of WPA activities in Savannah
6. Negro sewing room
7. Nutritional lunch program
8. Pin Point adult education class
9. White sewing room
10. Writer's project achievement week

Selected Bibliography

“The Great Depression” New Georgia Encyclopedia.

<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/great-depression>

Sullivan, Buddy in association with the Georgia Historical Society. Georgia: A State History. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003.

Works Progress Administration District 8 scrapbook and photo album 1940-1941. MS 1250. Courtesy of the Georgia Historical Society

“World War I in Georgia.” New Georgia Encyclopedia.

<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/world-war-i-georgia>

“World War I Military Camps.” New Georgia Encyclopedia.

<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/world-war-i-military-camps>

Suggested GHS Sources

WWI

[Sophia's Schoolhouse: Teaching WWI, a Resource Guide](#)

[Sophia's Schoolhouse: Using Archives to Study Veterans](#)

[Online Exhibit: Global Conflict: World War I](#)

[WWI and the Girl Scouts](#)

[Georgia during WWI: Primary Sources](#)

[Today in Georgia History: WWI in Georgia](#)

[Today in Georgia History: Corra Harris](#)

[Today in Georgia History: Spanish Flu](#)

Great Depression and New Deal

[Georgia Historical Marker: Roosevelt's Barnesville Speech](#)

[Historical Marker: Forsyth Park](#)

[Historical Marker: Walter Bernard Hill Hall](#)

[Online Exhibit: Georgia in the 1930s](#)

[Online Exhibit: Social Movements, Women's Suffrage](#)

[Primary Sources: Great Depression and New Deal](#)

[Sophia's Schoolhouse: Savannah's First Girl Scout Cookie Sales](#) and [Classroom Activity](#) to follow the video

[Today in Georgia History: Franklin D. Roosevelt](#)

[Today in Georgia History: Vidalia Onion](#)

[Today in Georgia History: Georgians at Chicago World's Fair](#)

[Today in Georgia History: Walter F. George](#)

[Today in Georgia History: FDR's Controversial Speech at Barnesville](#)

[Today in Georgia History: Boll Weevil](#)

Suggested Search Terms

- Chicago World Fair
- [Boll Weevil](#)
- [The New Deal](#)

- Spanish Influenza
- Works Progress Administration
- Social Security
- [Franklin D Roosevelt](#)
- [Flint River Farms Resettlement Community](#)
- Stock Market Crash, 1929
- [Woodrow Wilson](#)
- [Fort McPherson](#)
- Herbert Hoover
- [E.D. Rivers](#)
- [Eugene Talmadge](#)
- [Warm Springs](#)
- [Civilian Conservation Corps](#)
- [Agricultural Adjustment Act](#)
- [Rural Electrification Act](#)